

SCOTTISH BORDERS COUNCIL
23 SEPTEMBER 2021
APPENDIX I

To Executive Member for Adult Wellbeing

1. Can the Executive Member advise how many occupational therapists employed by Scottish Borders Council were in post in the Borders as at 31st March 2020, as at 31st March 2021 and are currently in post now?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston

Based on information provided by HR –

31/03/20 – 13 Occupational Therapists

31/03/21 – 16 Occupational Therapists (13 WTE)

Current Vacancies – 2 x F/T

2. Can the Executive Member advise how many grant applications for aids and adaptations to private dwellings were received in the last two financial years and have been in this financial year, what percentage of the applications were granted aided or are presently outstanding, what percentage of the applications required or will require an assessment on site and how many of those assessments have been carried out?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston

Private sector grants for major adaptation:

As per best practice and reflected within Scottish Borders Council's Scheme of Assistance all requests for assistance are subject to assessment. Assessment identifies people's needs and the ability of their house to meet that need. That foundation then allows for a considered recommendation to be made. Consequently, 100% of applications received for a private sector housing grant have had a needs' assessment carried out prior to submission.

Grant Applications	
2019/20	87
2020/21	29
2021/22	16

We operate a collaborative approach in regard to delivery of major adaptations – pre application discussions are routinely held to ensure submission of valid applications and efficiency of service. Consequently 100% of applications received have been approved

Question from Councillor Bell

To Executive Member for Adult Wellbeing

I have become concerned about our Social Work Department's capacity to resource Care at Home provision. On how many occasions in total over all of the past 3 months have SBC been unable to resource 'packages' of Care at Home, either through our own staff or using contracted staff?

To understand this in context what - if any – were the equivalent figures for the same 3 months in 2019, and 2017; assuming that these numbers can be identified?

Reply from Councillor Weatherston

Social Work maintain a waiting list at all times by locality over the previous 3 years over July, August and September. A summary of the waiting list over a month is shown below in Table 1

	2019	2020	2021
Month	Total	Total	Total
July	50	43	44
August	53	46	49
September	62	47	71

What this highlights is over the last 3 years July and August have remained at stable waiting lists averages however we are seeing a significant spike in September 2021 against normal waiting lists. The detail of this has seen a significant spike in the central area which is predominantly down to a significant number of vacancies in Care at Home across all providers in the Central area.

Members should note that clients awaiting packages of care are receiving care in the main whether formal or informal and Social Work are providing Support and guidance.

Care at Home capacity has come under increasing pressure over last couple of months, not only across Scottish Borders but also nationally as reported. This is due to two drivers:

- Demand - Increase in complexity of care
- Supply - Increasing vacancies across the sector

We are seeing an increase in the complexity of need and demand for services in Care at Home long with a significant pressure in employment with Health and Social Care (H&SC). Pressures in staffing have increased as a result of COVID as people left the sector due to pressure coupled with an inability to attract staff into the sector and significant competition in other employment markets and other similar paid roles.

As a critical issue across H&SC in Borders we are working collaboratively both with health colleagues and through the Recovery Board internally looking at options to increase capacity within the Homecare area through use of different mechanisms to provide non registered care, to quickly progress recruitment and training and to actively attract people to the care sector.

Supplementary

Councillor Bell advised that he remained concerned and asked if Members could be made more aware of the pressures on care staff. Councillor Weatherston undertook to discuss this with officers.

Questions from Councillor H. Scott

1. To Executive Member for Transformation & Service Improvement

In terms of the Gaelic Language (Scotland) Act, 2005, what are the current estimates, both in officer time, and monetary value, of completing Scottish Borders Council's Gaelic Language Plan to fully comply with the provisions of the Act?

Reply from Councillor S. Hamilton

An estimate of officer time incurred in developing the Gaelic Language Plan amounts to £6296. The officer time is fully funded within the approved Council budget.

This is made up of 4 different officers carrying out various tasks ranging from initial research, producing the Plan, preparation of the statutory consultation and writing the covering committee report, as well as meetings with the Gaelic Board. The estimate also includes time to conduct a staff survey which is still to be carried out.

2. To Executive Member for Infrastructure, Travel And Transport

Note: Councillor Edgar had left the meeting by this point and the Convener advised that the answer to the question would be passed on to Councillor Scott. That answer is replicated below.

The Stirling Street / Park Street / Stirling Place junction in Galashiels is one of the busiest in the town, carrying not only motor cars, but 'buses travelling to and from the Transport Interchange. Northbound traffic in Stirling Street must give way to traffic travelling from Stirling Place to Park Street, but at the moment is governed only by a single pole mounted 'give way' sign. The give way road markings at the junction are almost invisible. The absence of clear road markings at this very busy junction is causing confusion, and some danger, not only to drivers who may miss the sign, but to pedestrians crossing the road at that junction.

On 15 March 2021, I was told that the give way markings would be renewed at some point. Can I ask that some urgency is given to the repair of the give way markings on the road surface to mitigate against, as far as possible, vehicular accidents occurring there, and when are these repairs likely to be carried out?

Councillor Edgar had left the meeting but the following response was provided to Councillor Scott following the meeting:-

The Council is responsible for a significant road network, which is in excess of 3000km, and whilst every effort is taken to deliver our planned improvement programme efficiently and to the benefit of the communities we serve, there are significant challenges balancing the demands placed across such a large network with the resources we have.

However notwithstanding all of this the intention to undertake road relining works at Stirling Street/Park Street/Stirling Place as soon as practicably possible and this will be as part of a larger programme in the wider Galashiels area with this likely to be delivered during October 2021. Clearly complications can happen where weather and other priority initiatives emerge and this will be kept under review

Question from Councillor H. Anderson

To the Executive Member for Community Development & Localities

I am pleased to hear that the Scottish Government are providing additional funding for play parks. I understand that the Scottish Borders will receive an initial allocation of an additional £113,000 to support play park provision across the Borders.

Given that this additional funding was not factored into our budget deliberations in February, can you advise of the democratic process to be used by this council in order to ensure a fair and equitable allocation of these funds across the whole council area?

Reply from Councillor Tatler

Scottish Government have announced a £5million programme of investment nationally into Play parks. SBC has initially been offered an allocation which totals £113k towards its play park estate. The offer is conditional on the investment having been delivered by the end of March 2022, and key to the principles Scottish Government wish to see observed in the process of determining where the money is spent is that children and young people are involved in the prioritisation process.

Whilst this grant is hugely welcomed the challenges it presents to the council and also to the play park manufacturing industry are significant.

The funding criteria does not therefore lend itself to seeing investment delivered across 11 wards in this financial year. That said, we are led to believe that this is only the first tranche of a potentially larger amount signalled to be invested in play parks by Scottish Government. If we did receive further funding then we can expect to deliver benefits and improvements across the remaining play park estate in the Scottish Borders.

Importantly, this Council has an ambitious play park investment programme in place already and we intend to use both our investment plans aligned with the investment by Scottish Government to

speed up the delivery programme, subject to the conditions placed on us by the Scottish Government for any future funding.

As to how we will assess and determine priorities with our communities.

Officers will shortly be contacting members asking them to confirm their ward level priorities for investment. Once understood, members can expect to be advised of the outcome of that process and next steps towards delivery including what level of engagement and involvement is achievable given the tight timeframes for delivery.

However, the expectation for engagement to form part of the process carries with it risks in terms of delivery and its only correct to outline those risks at this stage.:-

- It is understood that suppliers are advising a minimum of 20 week lead in time from placing orders to having equipment produced and ready for installation;
- Typically an installation of circa £113k could expect to take 4 weeks;
- Suppliers have in-house design capacity which is used to aid the visualisation and eventual procurement decision, this capacity is restricted due to the impacts of Covid;
- Suppliers are faced with meeting the demands across Scotland as well as their normal business;
- Installation companies in Scotland are also impacted on the scale of the investment nationally, given their limited capacity also.

There only remains 26.5 weeks until the end of March 2022, so this is an extremely tight timeline and will require some flexibility from stakeholders including members, suppliers and potentially Scottish Government if this valuable opportunity is not to be lost.

Supplementary

Councillor Anderson sought assurance that communities would be involved in how this extra money was spent. Councillor Tatler advised that consideration would need to be given to how this was done. Councillor Parker highlighted that the funding was quite small in play park terms and that it would be difficult to spend the money by the end of March 2022 given the current shortage of play equipment.